

“Policies against Hunger” Conference on 27/28 June 2023

Human rights-based approaches to food systems transformation

Food is a fundamental human right, and the adequacy, accessibility and availability of food are essential for a life in dignity as well as for human development and well-being. However, this basic right is often violated in the current food systems. At the same time, unsustainable food systems have become a main contributor to global environmental degradation, thus contributing to future violations of the right to food: Many food systems are falling short of the aspirations of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Poverty and hunger remain entrenched, while obesity and other forms of malnutrition are rising. Unsustainable food systems significantly contribute to anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions. They are a key driver of land-use change and biodiversity loss. At the same time, they are under enormous pressure by climate change, putting global food security and nutrition further at risk. These impacts are felt most acutely by vulnerable groups, in particular women, youth, indigenous peoples, smallholders and agricultural workers.

The right to adequate food is a fundamental human right and provides an international normative framework based on obligations, accountability and international cooperation to provide States with guidance for respecting, protecting and realizing the right to food. It has implications on a wide range of policy fields. Human rights-based approaches consider the impact of food systems on the enjoyment of human rights, including the right to food, the right to health, the right to work, and the right to a healthy environment. These approaches focus attention on the situation of particularly marginalized persons and groups and on how their right to adequate food, work etc. should be prioritized in food systems and their transformation. They also acknowledge the impact of food systems on the environment, including climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution. Moreover, they take into account possible trade-offs between environmental or economic objectives and the right to food. For example, vulnerable groups generally benefit from climate change mitigation. However, certain mitigation measures can also have negative impacts on these groups. By considering these interconnected factors, food systems can be transformed to be more sustainable, resilient - and just.

At the 2023 Global Forum for Food and Agriculture (GFFA) in Berlin hosted by Federal Minister Cem Özdemir, ministers from 64 countries reiterated their commitment to realize the right to adequate food and to implement the 2030 Agenda.

With the “Policies against Hunger” Conference, the German Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture (BMEL) aims to work on specific guidelines for food systems transformation that can be derived from a human rights perspective. What does it mean for policy design and the way how food systems are governed when fighting hunger and all forms of malnutrition are not just looked at from a needs perspective but the perspective of individuals’ entitlements that correspond with the responsibility and accountability of duty-bearers?

Conference participants’ shared findings and recommendations will feed into international efforts to advance food systems transformation, for instance in the context of the 2030 Agenda, the 2023 UN Food Systems Stocktaking Moment and work at the United Nations Committee on World Food Security (CFS), as well as national policymaking.

There will be a special focus on the following issues:

1. Crises resilience of food systems
2. The role of smallholders in food systems transformation
3. Better governance to transform our food systems
4. The role of CFS in advancing the right to adequate food

WG 1 Crises resilience of food systems

The challenges to ending hunger and all forms of malnutrition keep growing. The climate crisis, pandemics, natural disasters, political instability in many countries, armed conflicts in different regions of the world and particularly the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine continue to have severe consequences on global food security and nutrition. They have further highlighted the fragilities of food systems worldwide. Meeting the objectives associated with transformed food systems inevitably implies that food systems have to be resilient – ensuring that people can access adequate food and protect their livelihoods when food systems are hit by extreme events, market shocks, political instability or conflicts.

With a view to assist and protect the most vulnerable groups – both in rural and urban areas – we want to discuss the following questions:

How can States make sure that those who are already in need are not again hit hardest by the implications of regional or global conflicts? How do we make sure that crisis response reaches the most vulnerable and respects their right to food and access to adequate nutrition? What makes food systems resilient to shocks in the long term? Where and what

kind of governance is needed on a global level to foster the resilience of food insecure countries?

WG 2 The role of smallholders in food systems transformation

Smallholders – including small-scale farmers, food producers, pastoralists, forest keepers, and fishers – are pivotal to transforming global food systems: from the sustainable management of the environment to growing more nutritious food. While their contributions to food supply vary enormously between countries, it is clear that – regardless of the exact definition – they produce an enormous share of the global food supply.

Smallholders are especially critical for the food security and nutrition of vulnerable groups. At the same time, they themselves are often among the hungriest people in the world. In addition, smallholders serve predominantly domestic and local markets, including communities without access to modern supermarkets.

Smallholders may lack capital and other resources, legal rights and tenure, access to markets, and access to agricultural extension services. In this regard, the situation of women is of particular concern. Despite being largely responsible for the food on farms and in families, women do not have access to the same resources as men.

We will discuss how to make sure that smallholders are adequately considered in the food systems transformation process. How can we levy the potential for inclusive growth and foster essential income levels? How can smallholders get better access to food supply chains? How can we empower women and avoid adverse impacts on them? What role do different farming systems, including agroecological approaches, play in this respect?

WG 3 Better governance to transform our food systems

Food systems governance can be defined as the ‘processes and actor constellations that shape decision-making and activities related to the production, distribution and consumption of food’. With respect to food systems transformation, governance arrangements are guided by the ambition to achieve better nutritional, social, environmental and economic outcomes.

Success largely depends on the interaction between all actors as well as on strengthening governance capabilities through reflection and learning. Therefore fundamental governance challenges involving questions of legitimacy, accountability, transparency, inclusiveness and the rule of law have to be considered.

We will discuss the role of governance in food systems transformation both on a global level and on regional and national levels. What are the preconditions and essential elements of

successful transformative food systems governance? What state obligations exist under the right to food and how are they best implemented? What policy instruments can support transformation processes advancing the right to adequate food? What is the best way to channel transformation needs from the local to the national and international levels? What has to be done on a global level to support this evolutionary change?

WG 4 The role of CFS in advancing the right to adequate food

Against the background of the 20th anniversary of the Voluntary Guidelines to support the Progressive Realization of the Right to Food coming up in 2024, we would like to discuss how CFS may best serve the advancement of the progressive realization of the right to adequate food.

Since CFS is the foremost inclusive international and intergovernmental platform for all stakeholders to work together, it offers a unique opportunity to guide progress towards the transformation to sustainable food systems and the progressive realization of the right to adequate food. In order to strengthen its impact, it is necessary to increase the visibility and uptake of CFS policy products on local, national, regional and global levels.

In order to explore factors that favor the implementation of policy products we would like to share experiences and good practices with respect to the use and application of CFS products at all levels. In addition, we shall look at how to improve the visibility of the CFS and its products as well as how to advance the collaboration of all stakeholders and other institutions. Another question to discuss is how to make best use of the convening power of the CFS to strengthen coordinated global policy responses to the multiple dimensions of the global food crisis.